WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A printing control apparatus which performs a printing process employing a plurality of printing devices, comprising:

5   printing attribute acquisition means for acquiring an attribute of a printing job to be processed;

adaptive environment determination means for obtaining device combinations capable of executing the printing job based on performance information representing

10   at least performance of each of the plurality of printing devices and the acquired attribute of the printing job; and

process flow presentation means for presenting process procedures of the printing process by a combination actually used to execute the printing job out of the device

15   combinations.

2.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a plurality of device combinations exist, said adaptive environment determination means determines an order of the device combinations under a condition designated in

20   advance, and presents the device combinations in that order.

3.   The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the performance information includes pieces of information on a printing speed, a cost, and a device

25   installation place, and

said adaptive environment determination means determines the order under a condition including any one

of the printing speed, the cost, and the device installation place.

4.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus further comprises state acquisition means for acquiring a process state of a printing device in use for executing the printing job, and

said process flow presentation means presents a current process status together with the process procedures on the basis of the acquired process state.

5.   The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein of the presented process procedures, a procedure which is in progress or is to be performed next is emphatically displayed to present the current process status.

6.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the process procedures include a message which prompts checking or replenishment of an expandable used by the printing device as a preparation process.

7.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus further comprises display means for displaying device combinations capable of executing the printing job so as to be able to select one of the combinations, and

said process flow presentation means presents process procedures of the printing process by a combination selected via said display means.

8.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when the attribute of the printing job contains color printing, said

adaptive environment determination means detects monochrome and color pages contained in the printing job, and determines a combination so as to print the monochrome page by a monochrome printing device.

5   9.   The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus further comprises state acquisition means for acquiring a device state of a device that included in the device combination actually used to process the printing job, and

10   said process flow presentation means changes a display state of the process procedure on the basis of the device state acquired by said state acquisition means.

10.   The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said process flow presentation means emphatically presents a

15   procedure which is in progress or is to be performed by a user out of the presented process procedures.

11.   A printing control method for performing a printing process employing a plurality of printing devices, comprising:

20   a printing attribute acquisition step of acquiring an attribute of a printing job to be processed;

an adaptive environment determination step of obtaining device combinations capable of executing the printing job based on performance information representing

25   at least performance of each of the plurality of printing devices and the acquired attribut of the printing job; and

a process flow presentation st p of presenting

process procedures of the printing proc ss by a combination actually used to execute the printing job out of the device combinations.

12.   The method according to claim 11, wherein

5   the method further comprises a display step of displaying device combinations capable of executing the printing job on display means so as to be able to select one of the combinations, and

in the process flow presentation step, process

10 procedures of the printing process by a combination selected via the display means are presented.

13.   The method according to claim 11, wherein

the method further comprises a state acquisition step of acquiring a device state of a device that included in

15 the combination actually used to process the printing job, and

in the process flow presentation step, a display state of the process procedure is changed on the basis of the device state acquired in the state acquisition step.

20 14.   A computer-readable medium storing program code for causing a computer to execute a method for controlling a printing process employing a plurality of printing devices, comprising:

a printing attribute acquisition step of acquiring

25 an attribute of a printing job to be processed;

an adaptive environment determination step of obtaining devic combinations capable of executing the

printing job based on performance information representing at least performance of each of the plurality of printing devices and the acquired attribute of the printing job; and

a process flow presentation step of presenting

5 process procedures of the printing process by a combination actually used to execute the printing job out of the device combinations.

15. A computer program product comprising a computer-readable medium having computer code for

10 controlling a printing process employing a plurality of printing devices, said product comprising:

a printing attribute acquisition process procedure code for acquiring an attribute of a printing job to be processed;

15 an adaptive environment determination process procedure code for obtaining device combinations capable of executing the printing job based on performance information representing at least performance of each of the plurality of printing devices and the acquired

20 attribute of the printing job; and

a process flow presentation process procedure code for presenting process procedures of the printing process by a combination actually used to execute the printing job out of the device combinations.

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